Carl Freeman

A TRIP TO MINERAL KING IN 1911

Written by Eugene Allen - 1958

Spring comes early in the San Joaquin Valley. Rains end or taper off in April, leaving the high country of the Sierras blanketed with snow. Also in our valley, the difference of a seemingly few days may issue in summertime. Suddenly the wild grasses of the fields and hills turn various shades of yellow to brown, and the lush green of springtime vanishes as if overnight.

As the advent of springtimes stirs the longing of the young or old to go to the fields or woods, the long warm days of summer bring a longing to many of us for the high country of the Sierras.

When a small boy, it was my father's relaxation and my pleasure to take Sunday afternoon walks to the oak groves and creeks near Visalia. The St. Johns River in those days, was bordered with willows, oaks, cottonwoods, sycamores, and berry thickets. Many of the oak groves have since disappeared, and the beautiful tree border of the river removed, leaving it a barren looking ditch. During those walks, always to the east was the majestic wall of the Sierras. Because of the haze, they were colored a bluish tinge below the snowline. Sometimes, when I talked about the distant mountains, Mother would sing a song to me called, "The Blue Alsation Mountains". I thought of the Sierras then as the Blue Alsation Mountains and longed to be there - someday.

Remembrance is like a harp of many strings, and the old query, "Do you remember?", often touches a tender cord in one's heart. Or, are memories (the happy ones) magical moments we have experienced, locked in Time, brought back by later association with an event or locality?

In the month of August, the San Joaquin flows under a cloudless sky. Grass is brown in the fields and hills, except for orchards and irrigated lands. The Sierras often seem to retreat behind a gossamer curtain of summer haze. Sometimes thunder heads blanket the higher summits, dissipating the haze, but hiding the serrated peaks like the veil over the face of a beautiful woman. When the veil is lifted, the summits stand out with the background of blue sky, majestic, serene, beautiful. Below the timberline are evergreen forests, and the canyons dim and mysterious. In the canyons are the many snow fed streams, clear, ever banding, tumbling and rippling, finally to reach the valley to help nourish the thirsty land.

Something deep in the elemental nature of man is elevated and inspired by contact with the mountains. For the eternal hills of my homeland seem to stand immutable, as if aloof from the common miseries of mankind, the wars, intolerance, poverty, selfishness and death itself. They seem to say, "Come to me, rest in my pristine beauty, feast your eyes on my forests, jewelled meadows, tread your feet on my many trails, drink of my crystaline waters; breathe deep of my healing air, dream by my campfires; rest, rest, peaceful sleep."

It was in the year 1911, the period of the tranquil years; a time when a dollar was worth a dollar; a time when relaxation was

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easier and heart failures less, and the tempo of the stream of life flowed slower. And, the world was at peace, except for a few trouble spots, wars were being read about in the history books.

I had just turned fourteen, and at that age the spirit of adventure still lives and breathes in a boy. Adventure it was, for Father had planned a trip to the mountains. The two Henry boys from Porterville were to go with us, and it was fun to talk about our plans with the boys. To Father, the trip meant a change, a rest from his law practice. He had just been appointed to the superior court bench by Governor Johnson, and after returning from this vacation, would assume his judicial duties. My father loved the mountains, and enjoyed to the utmost the simple pleasures of camping out. We would travel by team to Mineral King and from there, pack over the "Gap" to Little Kern River. I was in a dither of excitement. It would be like playing pioneer, the opening of a door to the unknown, to dreamed of places where trout abounded in the streams, wild animals roamed the forests; to cook over a camp fire, sleep on the ground, climb mountain peaks, and to see all kinds of new places and things.

To further the boyish idea of pioneering, for my recent birthday, Father had given me a brand new Winchester rifle, a 25-35 calibre carbine. The Henry boys also had deer guns, and I fully expected that we would live off the land like the pioneers of old, as far as meat was concerned. I was in keen anticipation of the time when the sights of my new gun would line up a big buck way back on the Little Kern.

Clear and warm was that August day, typically San Joaquin summer weather. It was our day to start the trip. Father had everything ready from our end. Our equipment was simple enough. Father never liked to make a show of anything, and was not in the least ostentatious. He would have been amused over the equipment modern day mountain dudes take on camping trips. Our outfit consisted of old coats, trousers and hats. Older shoes were resoled and hobnailed. Canvas leggings were laced up over the legs to the knees to keep dirt out. We had no sleeping bags or air mattresses. Old comforters and blankets were used for sleeping. The canvas used to cover the packs would serve in camp to cover the beds or for protection in case of a summer shower. Cooking utensils consisted of two frying pans, a Dutch oven, dishpan, tin plates and cups, coffee pot, sauce pans, plus cutlery. Other odds and ends comprised fishing gear, ammunition, medical first aids, toilet articles, and a flask of whiskey about completed our equipment. The Henry boys, Pat and Kruger were charged with the food list, and would load the same together with their belongings at Porterville.

Now the whiskey was for snake bites and that only. It was a prevalent idea in those days that if bitten by a rattlesnake, whiskey would sustain the heart action and help neutralize the poison. The victim was bled at the bite location, a ligature applied above the bite, and if plenty of whiskey was consumed, he was supposed to survive. Whiskey was always an item of equipment, but the flask was never opened in our case, as no rattlesnakes were even seen. It is not to be denied however, that quite a few mountaineers consumed whiskey for various reasons; maybe at the termination of a trip just to celebrate the fact that no one had been bitten, or just to keep snakes from biting them.

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Motor cars were still much of a luxury in 1911. For the average person, it was an event to take a ride in a horseless carriage. So, when Father announced that a rented car would take us from Visalia to Exeter where we would meet the Henry boys, the zenith of expectation was reached, and no one could ask for more. Shortly after 12 noon, an Overland touring car with the top down drove up to the house. Our dunnage was already on the sidewalk, together with the neighborhood boys who wanted to see me off. Some confusion was added to the scene by my collie dog barking and trying to jump into the car. A dog's way of letting it be known that he wants to go too. For a boy to go camping without his dog is a disappointment, but Father had previously said, "No". But after considerable pleading by me to include the dog, father gave in with a blunt statement that the dog would have to live on fish and biscuits. So, our baggage was loaded, along with the collie. The driver cranked up the motor and away we sped, east on Main Street, south on Court to Tulare Avenue, down past the sugar beet factory and east on the Farmersville road. Visable to the east was the Great Western Divide of our Sierras, vast, mysterious and beckoning. Soon we would be among the forests, peaks and streams for several glorious weeks.

In the early 1900's, no super highways or smooth oiled roads served the traveler. Some roads between the towns were oiled enough to lay the dust. Other roads were plain dust and dirt. However, if roads were below today's standards, the beauty of the countryside pleased the eyes of the traveler. The delta lands of the Kaweah, the rich soil of which prompted the first settlers to tarry, branched out from the foothills like a huge fan. The great oaks followed water courses spreading out to cover a width of ten miles or more. Willows, cottonwoods, sycamores, wild grape, alders, berry thickets and elderberry bushes lined the stream banks. The pattern of open fields and orchards filled the savanna like openings between oak groves.

Soon, too soon for me, (for auto rides were no everyday occurrence) we were past Farmersville, and shortly arrived at the S. P. Depot in Exeter. There the Henry boys were already awaiting us with a real three-seater open stage. This type of vehicle was used quite extensively then for mountain travel. It had a rack at the back for baggage, and a canvas canopy top. I had expected to see four horses hitched to the stage, like the pictures in the magazine illustrations, but Pat held the reins to only two. After greetings, I questioned that only two horses could pull us over the grades. Assurances came from the boys that the team was in excellent shape, and would get us there and back. (Later, I learned that one horse was 17 and the other 19 years old.) Most of the supplies having been loaded on the stage at Porterville, it did not take long to load our's. Father paid off the Overland driver, and we were off with Three Rivers the first night stop.

Clippity clop, clippity clop, sounded the team's hoofs on the roadway as we passed by orange grove and vineyard. After reaching Lemon Cove, we entered the foothills coming to the first grade called Limekiln Hill. The road to Mineral King was constructed in the 1870's to, what was then considered promising mineral deposits. It was surveyed to reach that area by the shortest distance. Modern road construction equipment did not then exist to expedite moving dirt, cutting banks or making fills. Many steep grades could not be eliminated. The gold and silver seekers had very applicable

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names for grades or places along the road. Names referred to some event having happened at the place, or applied to the locality itself. There was Limekiln Hill, Pumpkin Hollow, Red Hill, River Hill, Champagne Hill, Lookout Point, Slap Jack Grade, Timber Point, and Grave Yard Hill. East of Limekiln, the road went down grade for a ways. Past the Akserben orange grove and near the river, Pat stopped the team to have a drink from a turnout in a ditch. Many oldtimers will remember this turnout. From Lemon Cove and on, the road was all-dirt and rock surface. There was dust aplenty, but it had a mountain odor to it, was a part of camping, and no one complained.

Our mountains were changeable in that atvarious elevations, the plant and tree covers vary as to kind. The change is so gradual that it becomes a part of one's vision without much awareness. You first enter the foothills, grassy slopes with some rock outcroppings. As seen from the valley, the foothills form a buttress to the higher ranges. To watch the shadows at the close of a summer's day when the sun is low intermingling with canyons and draws, is a silent invitation for a rest. And the quiet twilight, softening the ruggedness of rock and ridge, is suggestive of peace. In the higher foothills, white oaks intermingle with grass and shrubs. Slightly higher, live oaks, buckeyes, red bud and white oak thrive with heavier growth of shrubbery. Down along the stream courses, pools and ripples are shaded by live oaks, sycamores, willows and alders. Up the road goes; and at about 2500 feet, the traveler enters a belt of heavy shrubbery growth. Here, where solid rock is absent, the mountainsides seem to present a solid mat of rampant varieties of shrubs with some oaks, the pale green of manzanita prevailing. To try to force a way through this tangle of growth is impossible unless one crawl on all fours. Around the 4500 foot elevation, evergreens appear, ponderosa pines and incense cedars. Suddenly the road enters a pine forest, the oaks having disappeared, except for some large leaf black oaks. Manzanita still thrives, but it is sparse and smaller. In places, the slopes beneath the pines have a groundcover known by the names of tar weed or bear clover. The bear clover has a pleasant aromatic odor. After walking through it, the odor will stay with jeans and shoes and is always reminiscent of the high country. In the drier spots where there are rock outcroppings, is found the attractive chinquapin with its golden brown leaves. In certain areas of Tulare County, at about the 6000 foot level, the mighty Sequoias dominate pine and fir, their reddish shafts dwarfing all else. Pines, being wonderful trees, are not restricted to certain elevations, but overlap. One may find Jeffery pine with red fir and ponderosa. White firs will seek some of the same elevations as white pine and juniper. At 8000 feet and higher, firs become fewer, white pine and juniper replacing them. At the timberline, foxtail, limber and white-bark pine fight the never-ending battle for existance.

About dusk we arrived at the Britten store and post office at Three Rivers. Three Rivers was named for the three streams that converge near the place, the North, South and Main Forks of the Kaweah. No habitation in the back country was without dogs. They were welcoming committee friendly or no, as well as watchers. Several rushed out to see what our business was, and our collie immediately responded with barking and growling to take up our business with them. After the dog clamor subisded, the team was unharnessed and

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turned into the corral south of the store to be fed and pass the night. Noel Britten, who operated the store and post office, also furnished meals ranch style to travelers. A dinner bell rang and we boys needed no other invitation to partake of their bountiful table. Supper over, canvas was spread on the ground back of the corral, and blankets arranged for sleeping. All turned in shortly, and after some talk of the morrow, the quiet of the summer night closed down and consciousness drifted into sleep.

Suddenly it was morning. Father called, "Time to shine, a long day ahead". Bedding was rolled up, the team harnessed to the stage, followed by a good breakfast. Upon leaving Three Rivers, Father took over the driver's seat. No doubt Pat, who was 16, could handle the team, but today's travel would cover the worst part of the road, and Father had been over it before. From Three Rivers the road followed up the canyon, much as it does today. Beyond the Hammond Power House, it turned east, and the steep, hard grades prevailed, meaning real work for the team. Today as the road passes the Hammond Fire Station, it switches back and forth on mostly a high gear grade to the top of Red Hill. In 1911, it took a short cut almost straight up a draw until it reached the summit of old Red Hill. One did not miss or overlook much of the passing scene in the horse and buggy days. With a team moving two or three miles per hour on the grades, the eyes had time to scan rocks, ravine, canyon, shrub or trees which enhanced the landscape, and changed with every bend in the road. In those days it took two days traveling to cover the same distance now consumated by motor car in two hours. Auto travel misses many of the little, but interesting, things along the road, a deer peering through the brush, a ground squirrel sitting on a rock, a snake track crossing the road, saucy jays or darting lizards, a lazy hawk soaring with the wind.

Our team had no trouble pulling up Red Hill as they were still fresh. Also, our collie dog was complacent as to road travel. He was content to sit on the stage seat most of the time, or if restless, for a change would trot under the vehicle out of the sun. About noon time we were on the summit of Red Hill looking down into the box canyon of the East Fork. As if suddenly impatient to meet the stream, the road plunged downward. Father put on the brakes as we picked up speed, and the team showed interest as if to know a rest was coming. Much faster than it took to pull up Red Hill, we reached the floor of the canyon, crossing a narrow wooden bridge over the East Fork. The team was pulled up under the shade of a live oak. It was time to eat our lunch, rest the team, and prepare for the grind ahead. Feed bags with barley ration were buckled on the horses, and while they contentedly munched, we ate sandwiches prepared by the Brittens.

At this point, the Kaweah, through the ages, has fashioned a boy canyon upstream for some miles. Near where we rested, a limpid pool mirrored the cliff above. A waterfall, spilling into the pool was the only sound breaking the quiet of the noontime. The worst part of the road lay ahead, old River Hill Grade. Father said it would take most of the afternoon to travel it. Lunch finished and all ready, Father again took the reins, and with some trepidation, I wondered what lay ahead.

One can still see the traces of old River Hill Grade from the present day road. Straight up from the canyon floor rises the

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precipitous face of a bare granite hill. This hill is in the form of a semi-circle like inverted bowl. To get around this cliff-like obstacle, the road had to be blasted out of solid rock. Consequently, the road had no soil cover. It was steep, rough slabs of rock rising to other slabs. It was more like a stream bed in places than a road. Teams had a hard time, the iron on hoofs finding traction difficult. Our team had to halt often to recover their wind. After several stops, the team in a lather of sweat refused to budge. The usual commands of Father had no effect. They stood dejected, heads drooping. Slaps of rein or touch of the whip failed to stir them. The balky team had picked the worst part of the road to stall or rest. After a few minutes without results, the scene started to appear funny to us boys, especially me. The day was warm, Father was perspiring from the strain as well as the heat, and it was in no way funny to him. He was irked with the team, and almost on the point of blowing up. He said, "You boys get out and walk up the road. Maybe that won't be so funny, and the team will have less weight to pull." We had hardly walked around the first bend when we could hear Father urging the balky team with, "Up boys, up." Then in a louder tone, "Get up damn you", and finally shouting, "Get up you --- --- --". Father was a mild man and such language was somewhat of a shock, probably to the team also, for either the cussing or the rest got the team moving again. We boys, the humor expended, waited for the stage to catch up with us. Shortly we were around the rock face, and once more the road had a dirt surface. Still it was steep, the grade reaching 30% in places. Mountain terrain was still brush, rocks and oaks, almost inpenetreble. From the bottom of the canyon where we ate our lunch to Cain Flat was only a few miles, yet it took up most of the afternoon. In late afternoon we reached Cain Flat, and passing the Griffis place, now known as Oak Grove, stopped to rest the team at a watering trough. Water troughs were placed along the road at almost every permanent spring. In later days they were useful for refilling hot radiators. After passing Oak Grove, the road went downhill for a few hundred yards, as if the worst was over. But next was Champagne Hill Grade, steep and long, but not as rough as River Hill. Could some imaginative traveler, after the grind over River Hill Grade, have named this old well known grade? In a bucket packed with ice, could he have had bottles of champagne? Corks could have popped on a hot summer day to refresh jaded spirits, thus giving the name.

From Champagne Hill to Grunigen's ranch was about two miles. There we could stop of the night. No particular trouble was experienced pulling the two miles. Soon we could see the ranch buildings located at the end of a semi-flat ridge. About a quarter of a mile from the ranch, the road went downhill. The poor team sensed rest ahead, and tore downhill at a fast pace, brakes grinding on wheels, and Father pulling hard on the reins. In the old days, Grunigen's was a half-way point on the road to Mineral Kings. Meals were served travelers, and limited overnight accomodations could be had. Feed was available for stock. The tired team was watered, unharnessed, and stabled in the barn for the night. Washing up for supper was next as we were all begrimed with the dust of the road. For this service on the west porch, was a bench on which were several tin wash basins, bars of soap, and towels hanging on pegs. Water was supplied from a flume, its source a small creek near the ranch. My! How good it felt to be rid of the dust and grime. As usual, the meal was served ranch style, platters heaped with home-cooked food, and passed around the table. It was long ago, but I remem-

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ber the meal. Hungry boys needed no urging to pitch in. There were ranch-grown tomatoes sliced with bell peppers, cucumbers and lettuce. Pickled onions were a side dish. Platters were heaped with roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy and string beans. Pitchers of cool milk and lots of hot steaming coffee made the old fashioned way were passed back and forth. For dessert, tasty fruit pies ended the repast. All of this for 50¢ per person.

Outside, on the front porch, we relaxed on leather thonged chairs. To the south, through the gathering twilight, Homer's Nose mountain loomed. Down in the box canyon could be faintly seen the white waters of East Fork. As if by some magic signal, a cool, cool breeze came down the canyon, bringing with it the sound of tumbling waters with the rising and falling of the wind. Starlight replaced day, and it was bedtime. A lantern was lit, and we made our way down to the barn. Spreading out some hay in the loft, canvas was laid over the same, making a comfortable bed. The dog, well fed from table scraps, nestled at our feet. The song of the wind played a soothing lullaby. Only once or twice during the night was I conscious of the stomp of horses below in the stable.

Everyone seemed to wake up at the same time, and Father's cheery command to wash up for breakfast got us stirring. A sumptuous breakfast of hot mush, coffee, biscuits, ham and eggs, started the day right. Outside, shafts of sunlight were lighting up Lookout Point. The air was cool and exhilerating, one of those mornings that makes one want to live forever. Our team looked pert and rested, ready for the road. Pat took over the driving of the stage at this point. The sun, while sending his beams across Lookout Point, was still behind the ridge. Cottontails dashed across the road, and the early morning brought out the perfume from the leaves of mountain bay trees as if the leaves had been crushed to release the scent. Mineral King was still some 18 miles away, but steep as the road was, the worst stretch lay behind us.

Half way up Lookout Point Ridge was Cold Spring, ice cold water spilling into a trough. This point was the official entry station to Sequoia National Park on the Mineral King road. A squad of U. S. Cavalry were camped just below the road. It was their duty to check travelers in and out of the Park, to seal firearms, and to fight fires. Also, they were to check for liquor as it was not permitted in the Park in those days. I don't think the troopers used too much diligence in checking for liquor. When I was eight years old, Father and I went by stage for a ten day camping trip in Giant Forest. The checking station was on the old Colony Mill road. It was my pleasure to sit on the front seat with the stage driver. Between me and the driver was a water bucket covered by a piece of canvas. Boys being naturally curious, I peeked under the canvas to see three quart bottles of whiskey. The driver did not miss seeing my action, and sternly warned me to keep still about what was in the bucket, or the soldiers might arrest me. Arriving at the checking station, a soldier sauntered out, spoke to the driver, looked at the horses, asked the passengers for firearms, walked around the stage peeping here and there, but failed to pay any attention to the bucket. He doubtless knew of the method of bringing in whiskey by stage, and might even be dur for one of the bottles.

At Cold Spring we stopped while a soldier checked us in. I do not recall that our guns were sealed, as we were probably

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warned not to fire them while in the Park, and to keep the dog from chasing deer. Sequoia Park is about six miles wide at this section, but by road, about ten miles, Mineral King being a few miles outside the east boundary. From Cold Spring it was only a few minutes drive to Lookout Point. It was truly named. Beyond, and to the east, is the canyon of the East Fork, old Saw Tooth rising high on the Great Western Divide. Back of us, we could see the road we had traveled, down to the point, Grunigen's, farthur down the end of Champagne Grade. To the south, Homer's Nose mountain forested to the top, reached into the blue. In the canyon below could be seen glimpses of the stream. We were still in the brush country, but to the east and south, evergreens stood out on the ridges like marching men.

Downward went the road, when we yet had higner elevation to attain. Old horse and wagon roads do this dropping downgrade for a spell to avoid a rocky formation. In the box canyon below Lookout Point was good fishing in the old days, if one was rugged enough to climb up and down to get around the cliffs, keeping at least one eye watching for rattlesnakes. The trout were not planted ones either, as the Almighty had put them there after the stream was born. In 1913, we vacationed at Grunigen's in August for two weeks. The Phil Alles were operating the ranch, Mr. Alles also operated the stage line to and from Mineral King. One weened he asked me, "Boy, do you really want to catch fish?" My answer was "Yes", of course. "Then, let's dig some worms and leave the trout flies at home." Sunday morning we trudged up the road toward Lookout Point. Just past the checking Station, Phil headed off the road on to a bushy ridge. He said this was his secret way to the stream. Down we went, Phil dodging brush thickets. In some places we had to crawl on all fours to get through. He seemed to know just what direction to turn, crawl, or go straight ahead. Soon we were at the bottom of the canyon. "Now, here's two .38 lead bullets to tie on your line", he said. "Bait your hook, and let it go to the bottom, and don't pull up too quick as the fish nibble first. Give them time to partly swallow the hook." In the box canyons were wonderful pools, deep, with ripples on the surface. It was hard going to climb over bluffs to get to the pool above. But the fishing! Fat rainbow trout, most of them twelve to fourteen inches rewarded our efforts. We fished the gorges up to the Lookout Point Trail, having to pass up some pools because it was not possible to get to them. We came out with a catch of fish to satisfy the hopes of the most avid angler.

Past Trauger's Point, a few miles from Lookout Point, is a steep pull named Slap Jack Grade. Here, the black oaks and mountain mahogany are companions to manzanita and buckthorne. At the top of the next point, the road switches back to the north into Redwood Canyon. Here the first few pines are encountered. In the upper end of the canyon, the road crosses Redwood Creek, where standing together are two lovely sequoias, twins almost in their perfection of shape and size. Pat pulled up the team, and we delved into sandwiches and boiled eggs for lunch.

Leaving Redwood Creek, up the grade goes again swinging back to the south to Timber Point. Rounding Timber Point, the scenery changes immediately as if a curtain had been raised for a new act. A pine forest is on all sides, a welcome change from the oak and

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brush country below. Bear clover covered the ground beneath the pines, its delicious scent telling us that we were getting into the high country. Our road way leveled out for some distance with short grades between. Firs began to mingle with the pines, then sequoias. We were in the Atwell Mill area, as huge redwood stumps on either side of the road were a reminder of the primeval forest. Many of these tree giants were felled to go into fence posts, shingles, grape stakes and siding in earlier days. Few are cut today, most sequoias being in protected park areas. Then, too, their use has been supplanted by the coast redwood. Old abandoned huts and shacks along the way were ghosts of former activity. In no way did they detract from the scene, but rather added charm to it, their weathered appearance blending with the landscape.

East of Atwell's Mill is Soldier's Flat, located in a fairly level area with a little stream running through it. It was named when the Park was first formed. A troop of U. S. Cavalry used the flat as a camp. In lieu of rangers, they were guardians of the Park. The flat was an ideal camping area for those who preferred the heavy forest. Today the flat is filled with summer cabins. Much of the Atwell Mill country was private land when the Park was formed, and remains so today.

Not far from Soldier's Flat, the road, as if to get even for the welcome change of a level stretch, started up a steep, rough grade called Graveyard Hill, the last heavy grade on the way to Mineral King. Old Saw Tooth Peak lifted its inverted tooth above the timberline in full view. Another camping ground adjoined the road called Faculty Flat, named for a group of school teachers who had camped there one season. For the first time since leaving the stream at the foot of River Hill Grade, our road traversed the floor of the canyon. We could hear the musical sound of running water. Pat pulled up the team at what was called the "gate". Here, a reef of rock came down to the edge of the road. Barbed wire nailed to posts formed the gate for the stage to pass through. The canyon opened, small, lush meadows bordering each side of the stream. The forest thinned out, except to the north side of the mountain to our right. Following the canyon as it turned south, we forded the stream and drew up to a campsite along the creek. We had arrived at Mineral King, and the first leg of our journey was completed. The boys unhitched the team, fed them some barley, and they were turned loose to enjoy a well earned rest. While the Henry boys were tending the team, Father and I were busy unloading the stage. The stage was pushed off the road into some willows, and under Father's direction, we proceeded to set up camp. Our dog busied himself exploring the immediate territory and was rewarded shortly by two strange dogs running him back to camp. Fortified by our presence, he was brave indeed, barking defiance, but never the less, staying close to camp. We boys scouted for firewood, it being not too plentiful on account of the trees growing mostly on the higher slopes. It being a few hours before suppertime, we left Father getting things ready for the meal, and walked up to the store and postoffice a block away. A sign nailed to a tree read, "Mineral King, elevation 7,800 feet".

At the Mineral King store, we purchased a few food items and mailed post cards home. Getting back to camp, we put together trout rods to try our luck in the creek. We were not very successful, catching less than a dozen trout. However, on getting back to camp

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Father was coming along with the cooking and we were hungry. Some former campers had built a crude table, one end attached to a fir tree and the other supported by two legs cut from a pine bough. The table top was made from packing boxes nailed to cross members. We salvaged several empty boxes to use for seats. Our bill of fare was simple enough, but satisfying. Canned beef, potatoes, tomatoes, bread, hot chocolate, and fresh peaches brought from Grunigen's ranch comprised the meal. The chore of cleaning up dishes was left to us boys. To make our sleeping as comfortable as possible, we had located some straw near the store to spread on the ground. As we had no tent, our sleeping was in the open. All our bedding was used as the August nights at Mineral King can be cold. Canvas covered the beds to protect us from the dew. Sleeping in the open in the high country, one does not as a rule observe the nicety of wearing pajamas or night shirts. If it's cold enough, one wears a shirt and wool socks. I recall one exception to this when during a trip to Mt. Whitney, a camp was made above the timberline, almost at the foot of the peak. Two men of the party, in spite of warnings as to the cold, stripped and put on nightshirts. They were uncomfortable from the cold all night. I heated a rock over the campfire, put it in a gunny sack and inside my bed. Next morning the rock was still warm and 1/4 inch of ice had formed in the water bucket.

A fine, clear morning dawned in Mineral King with some light frost on the meadows. Mineral King was named by the Crabtree Party in 1873. Tom Fowler, a financier and promoter from San Francisco was enthused over the promising mineral deposits discovered in the 1870's. Since the days of 1849, there was a hope that the Mother Lode could be re-discovered in the southern Sierras. The road was built, machinery hauled piece by piece, buildings erected, and a tramway constructed from the Empire Mine down to the stamp mill. Fowler was so optimistic over the possibilities, that he bragged about paving the streets of Visalia with gold and silver. What started with so much exuberance was already foredoomed. Winter snowslides wrecked buildings, the ore, while profuse, was of low grade. Minerals to be extracted were contained in hard rock, and the process used was the wrong method. Fowler was killed in a train accident while on a trip to San Francisco to obtain additional capital, and from then on, operations ceased. In 1911, relics of the mining failures were still to be seen. Parts of the old tramway were still standing, constructed to transport ore from the Empire Mine 11,000 feet up on the mountain down to the mill. Old rusty cable supported empty ore buckets, the whole held in place by timbers in the form of a double tripod. Power was supplied by steam boilers located near the creek, the crumbling ruins remaining visible for many years. Water for the mill was supplied from Monarch Creek, its source above the falls. One can find lengths of the 6 inch pipe to this day on the north side of the creek. Up in Timber Gap are still remains of an old roadway high as the timberline which was used to transport timber and firewood to the Empire Mine. Stacks of corded firewood still stand waiting in vain through the years to be used. It has been said that the population of Mineral King was over 3,000 during its short boom.

If the Mineral King mines proved to be unprofitable, with results of failure, marked by old crumbling ruins of man's endeavors, it did not detract from the beauty and grandeur of the Mineral King area. The charm and beauty of the area grows on one with repeated

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trips. Mineral King proper comprises a canyon floor about three miles long. The floor perhaps averages a width of 200 yards of semi-level area, flat enough in places for cabin locations or camping. It is high country, surrounding peaks rising to heights of over 12,000 feet. Also, it is open country, one of vistas, the forested areas being in spots protected from snow slides. For the mountain sides are steep, and the winter snow slides have left their marks. Down the center of the canyon runs the willow lined creek, clumps of white bark, pine, aspen and firs breaking the line of willows in favored spots. Mountain cabins built in rustic fashion stand in locations free from the danger of snow slides. The fortunate possessors of these habitations are to be envied, for Mineral King is not commercialized, and I hope it never is. The residents spend weekends or lengthy vacations from June to September, not bothered by crowds or regulations necessitated by crowds. All is peace, sunny days, cool nights, and the invigorating air found only at such altitudes. Children above the age of toddlers are turned loose to play in safety as there are no rattlesnakes, and the creek is not deep enough to be dangerous. Meadows border the creek in places, spongy from many springs. Vistas are enticing. East is old Saw Tooth rising above the timberline to over 12,000 feet. North is Timber Gap, heavily forested, the timber having been used in the old days for the Empire Mine. To the south is Farewell Gap, a pass between two peaks, the gap itself being over 10,000 feet high. Always Farewell Gap is beautiful to contemplate, shaped like the "V" of a rifle sight. On the right side of the pass is Mt. Vandever, over 11,000 feet high. On its northerly slopes, snow banks last from season to season. This lasting bank of snow is called the "bear skin" because of its resemblance to the outstretched skin of a bear. Numerous small streams tumble down the steep slopes to join the main creek, their white waters cascading in a series of falls from the heights above. Various color shades of yellow, brown, red and grey, resulting from the mineral deposits form a tapestry pattern all along the east wall of the canyon. Greens of trees, meadows, and the whiteness of the granite above the timberline all fit into the picture, contrasts a delight to the eye.

One can plan and make a tour of the many beauty spots in the Mineral King county, and keep busy doing it for several weeks. Each of these side trips take up most of a day by foot or horseback. You take ample lunch of course, for appetites are good in the high country. Also, take a sweater or a coat for comfort's sake. If your legs and wind are good, you may disdain the saddle. Either way is the slow but sure way of enjoying the panorama made by nature. For visiting the lakes, you should also include your fishing gear. These lakes generally lay at altitudes of 10,000 feet or higher. Surrounding peaks or ridges form an amphitheatre with the lake as the stage. Each lake is like a gem of different shape and setting, forming a cup to receive the melting snow. White pines border some, others lay above the timberline. All are crystal clear, indescribably beautiful, their waters either lapping the feet of a mountain or reflecting its image in the lake's heart. Years ago the power company erected rock dams at several of the lakes to build up storage, and to regulate the outflow of water. They were built out of native rock and blended into the setting perfectly. Your itinerary would include Eagle, Franklin, Monarch, Crystal and Mosquito Lakes. Oft times the fishing will be disappointing. There are periods when lake trout refuse all baits or lures. I have seen monster trout in

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lower Mosquito Lake disdain all devices to hook or tempt them. These fellows, proud as patricians, moving leisurely like miniature submarines would even push the hook to one side.

Some days you must just loaf between exploring and sightseeing. There are mineral springs, soda, iron, sulphur and arsenic, all good for the health, and ice cold. Take citric acid, lemons or flavoring extracts and sugar, and you can concoct soda pop from several of the springs. Do not attempt to mix a whiskey and soda. All the springs have just enough trace of sulphur to turn your mix black as ink, and not much better tasting.

If satiated with fishing, just do some wandering to visualize the wonder, the delicacy of wild flowers up or down the canyon. They bloom from June to frosts in the fall. Actual tabulation by botanists indicated there are about 150 varieties of flowers and flowering shrubs in the Mineral King area. They abound at all elevations. I have seen the most delicate of flowering plants blooming away among the granite blocks high up on Saw Tooth Peak.

Today, Mineral King is in a Federal Game Preserve. Considerable deer, some bear, grouse and mountain quail inhabit the area, unmolested by man. However, the deer over-populate the area, destroying the feed and flowering plants. The fish and game people will have to return to the open season on bucks. I was in Mineral King several times when it was not in a game preserve. Few deer were ever seen, and most of the kills were made miles away from the area.

Each night we gathered enough wood to make a campfire. Before the cold settled down from the peaks, it was nice to sit around the fire absorbing its heat. Father was acquainted with many people in the county, and our evening campfire was generally shared with visitors. A campfire generates conviviality, conversation and tales. There was genial Arthur Crowley who had operated the store and post office for years. Probably knowing more about the Mineral King country than any one man, Mr. Crowley told how he helped his father build the road to Mineral King, the troubles teamsters had in pulling up the old River Grade. "You talk about fishing now. You should have been here to try the natural lakes when the country was first opened up. Before the power company built the dam at Eagle Lake, I caught a record trout just short of three feet."

And there was Bill Cluff (Clough), every summer working some mining claim, hoping some day to strike it rich. He had long grey hair and beard in the style of the early day trappers of the west. Some persons thought Bill was a little queer, but he only had the eccentricities common to men who spend much of their lives alone. Bill Cluff was a deeply religious man. He belonged to a sect called the House of David, located in Benton Harbor, Michigan. The men belonging to this sect wore their hair long and wore full beards. One of their tenets was that they would live forever, and Bill could prove the doctrine too, by quoting passages from the Scriptures. Bill told how he happened to discover the cave on the South Fork named for him. "I was prospecting in the vicinity before Sequoia Park was formed. In those days mountain men depended on their rifle for fresh meat. I noticed bear signs, and started tracking one up a limestone mountain. Several hundred feet up from the creek, I came upon a small, cavern-like pit. In this pit was the skeleton of an

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Indian, the skull grinning up at me. Why the Indian people picked a limestone pit up the side of the mountain to entomb one of their kind is something to speculate about. Thinking the place might have some more burial sites, I went on around the side of the mountain. Bear signs were plentiful, leading to a small opening in the limestone. It was big enough to crawl through, and upon pushing my body part way in, and shouting, the sound gave an echo indicating a cavern of some size. Not wanting to possibly meet a bear in the dark of the cave, I decided to go back to my camp and get a lantern. In due time, I returned to the opening with lantern and rifle. I had to chance a bear being inside. Crawling through the opening, I found myself in a cavern with height enough to walk standing up. The floor went upwards, the cave finally completing a circle. No bear was in the cave for which I was glad. At the time of its discovery, the cave contained very pretty formations of limestone, but the public has since broken off many."

Then there was an old man Crabtree, thin, tall, hair still dark, belying his age. Crabtree Meadows near Mt. Whitney are probably named for him. He had been all over the southern Sierras. Talk drifted to mining and lost mines. Someone in the group told about the lost Schipe mine over in Kings Canyon. How Schipe, a giant of a man, wanderer and trapper by trade, had arrived in Visalia one day with an Indian helper and pack mules. He had an exciting tale to tell, rock samples to prove it, of a rich find in Kings Canyon. Schipe too, was tracking a bear, when he claimed to have discovered the ore body. The samples dumped from his pack were speckled with gold, rich enough to rouse interest to fever pitch. Assays of samples were quickly made, resulting in estimated values as high as $500 per ton of rock. Financial offers were made for a partnership in the mine and accepted by Schipe. A party of interested men was organized so start the next day to properly stake off the find. "Just where was the location of the ore?" "Up the South Fork of the Kings, about a half mile from where it joins the Middle Fork." This was all that Schipe would divulge. Schipe was cautioned by his backers to maintain secrecy about the exact location of the ore body, and to stay sober. He could not however, refrain from seeking company as he had been alone with a taciturn Indian for months, and he longed to talk with his kind. A thirst for liquor had been generated by being months away from town. Men were ready and willing to set up drinks, if for no other reason to get Schipe to talk revealing the location of his find. Schipe, with the best of intentions, only planned to take a few. "Just enough to clear the mountain dust from my throat." Just a few increased to the point where Schipe was roaring drunk. Some of his friends tried to get him to go to bed, and be ready for the morrow's trip, but to no avail. As mentioned, Schipe was a huge man, and when under the influence, liked to brag about his physical prowess, how he could lick any man in a rough and tumble fight.

So the evening progressed, and in one saloon Schipe started to threaten one of the hangers-on for some reason only known to drunks. Both parties being drunk, Schipe's man was advised to go home and forget about Schipe's threats as they were only made on account of his condition, he being a friendly man when sober. This advice was followed as the men left. Schipe too, was urged to call it a night and get to bed. He insisted on one more for a night cap, and the time taken to drink it proved to be his undoing. All

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seemed to be ending peaceably when the saloon swinging doors opened and through them came the drunk Schipe had threatened earlier with a drawn gun. Before anyone could attempt to intervene, the man shouted that he was not going to take a beating from Schipe, leveled the gun, a shot rang out, and Schipe fell to the floor, killed instantly. Schipe's killer was jailed, threats were made, but order prevailed and subsequently, the man was freed by pleading self-defense.

Some consternation prevailed with Schipe's backers, for the reason that he had been vague about the exact location of the bonanza, and was now beyond telling. However, there was the Indian who had been with Schipe, and he ought to be able to guide them to the location. Leaving Schipe's killer to the justice of the courts, a party of men left the following day with all speed to stake out a claim on the bonanza. With them was the Indian, the only person who might have knowledge of Schipe's mine. When the party arrived in Kings canyon and in the locality described by Schipe, the Indian became vague and finally refused to help at all in the search. His reason was that gold was a curse to white men, and evil had attended man's greed for it. He would only bring a curse upon himself by having anything more to do with the search. "Let the white men search." He would remain in camp. No amount of urging, threat, or pleading could budge the Indian. So the party combed the area on both sides of the canyon of the South Fork of the Kings. It was rough country with heavy brush and precipitous, very difficult for men to cover. No trace of Schipe's mine could be found. It was believed by some that the find was not even in that area, that Schipe had planned to let out the secret when the party was well away from Visalia. In any event, the search proved fruitless, and the dejected men returned to Visalia. Many men have in subsequent years searched for Schipe's lost gold mine to no avail. The vastness of Kings Canyon holds perhaps a fortune in gold, kept secret by a lone Indian's fear of the curse of gold.

Then there was the tale of old man Crabtree. There is either a cache of silver metal, or a mine where it exists in almost a pure state, right in Tulare County. When I was a boy, I happened to be a member of a hunting party. In those days, there was no deer season, and no roads into the high mountains, only Indian and deer trails. There was also no limit on deer killed. Meat not needed by the hunters was dried into jerky and used in the same manner as is dried beef. Our party was camped in the vicinity of what is now known as Hockett Meadows. We too, had an Indian who served as a camp flunkey and guide. Someone in the party had one of those old muzzle-loading rifles, the kind where you rammed the charge down the barrel. The bullets were made from melted lead formed in a mold. The man owning the muzzle loader complained of running short of bullets. Our Indian stated that he knew where we could get some of the metal needed, only two days away. He was given permission to go, as the party had plenty of time to kill. The Indian refused to use a saddle horse, and insisted on going on foot. In the early evening of the second day, he was back. He had his lumps of lead, enough to make sufficient bullets to satisfy the owner of the old muzzle loader. A hot bed of manzanita coals was formed, the lead lumps placed in a small iron pot. After some time they melted to a stage where the metal could be poured in the bullet mold. Next morning a target was placed on a pine tree to test the accuracy of the molded bullets. The accuracy was satisfactory as the bullet

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hit the target.

Later, for some reason, one of the men became suspicious as to the lead, and without voicing his curiosity, he proceeded to dig the bullet out of the pine tree. His suspicions were well founded, having had experience in mining, he found the slug to be almost pure silver, not lead. He determined that it would do no good to keep his discovery from the rest of the party, so to their amazement he informed them. Rapid questions were leveled at the Indian. "We were his friends, tell us where the silver is. Who owned the cache? If no one had a claim to it, why not share with his white friends?" To all such requests, propositions, or promises, the Indian turned a deaf ear. "It must always remain a secret", he said. Misfortune always attended the white man's greed for the shining metal." He only intended to help out the white man who was short of bullets. It was useless to try to follow the tracks of the Indian. No trail existed and he had traveled across country." So there we were, a day or two from a cache of silver, the extent of which could only be surmised. It sounded like a real miner's yarn, but that's how I remember it.

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QUERY CORNER

Following is a list of official Post Offices that were established in Tulare County in the early days. We have no location for these and would appreciate knowing where they were and other pertinent information if available.

Battle Mound	Established 13 April, 1871	Discontinued 3 Aug., 1871
Crocker	18 Feb. 1880	9 March, 1880
Dodge	25 August, 1892	25 March, 1893
Hiko	13 April, 1880	5 Aug., 1881
Illinois Mills	7 Aug., 1867	28 Sept., 1868
Joneso	17 Aug., 1874	22 July, 1879
Mayville	15 Jan., 1878	18 Dec., 1878
Noradell	19 May, 1879	11 Oct., 1881
Redfield	12 Aug., 1880	14 Feb., 1881
Short	14 July, 1881	7 Aug., 1882
Wambat	24 June, 1874	10 March, 1876

Please address answers to: Secretary
Tulare County Historical Society
P. O. Box 295
Visalia, California
93277

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